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2010 : January 2010 - New Hot Papers : David Morens Discusses Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

new hot papers - 2010

January 2010



David Morens talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's New Hot Paper in the field of Immunology. The author has also sent along images of his work.



Article Title: Predominant role of bacterial pneumonia as a cause of death in pandemic influenza: Implications for pandemic influenza preparedness

Authors: **Morens, DM**; Taubenberger, JK; **Fauci, AS** [see also]

Journal: J INFECTION

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SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?

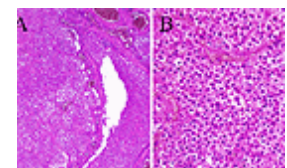
The results, that most of the 50-100 million deaths during the 1918 pandemic influenza were due not to influenza alone, but to bacterial complications, were surprising and have important implications for preventing influenza deaths today.

SW: Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?

It describes a new synthesis of knowledge; using old autopsy specimens and published bacteriologic and pathologic studies from 1918, at which time the viral cause of influenza was not known, we were able to show, with a high degree of certainty given the age of the data, that most deaths were caused by a now treatable complication of influenza.

SW: Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

We now have a better understanding of what killed so many people during the 1918 "Spanish flu" pandemic, the most fatal single event in



Examples of H&E-stained post-mortem lung sections from two influenza victims in 1918.

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human history, and this information should help us save countless lives in future influenza pandemics and seasonal outbreaks.

accompanying slide and descriptions.



SW: How did you become involved in this research, and were there any problems along the way?

I became involved by accident, helping a colleague ([Jeffery Taubenberger](#)) study different historical aspects of influenza. I kept coming across old publications that showed bacteriological and pathological findings from 1918 autopsies. After a while the strength and consistency of these forgotten data became impressive and I resolved to do a systematic historical/scientific search for all information I could find from 1918 influenza autopsy series.

The problems along the way were enormous and largely related to the historical research challenges, including the lack of any comprehensive bibliographic sources at that time. Thousands of papers had to be sought and read and analyzed, which took more than two years to do, with the help of many research and library colleagues.

SW: Where do you see your research leading in the future?

I think the impact on public health and health policy planners and on medical practitioners has been great and is likely to continue for some time. The information has already substantially impacted our federal response to the current swine [H1N1](#) pandemic. Physicians now have to rethink preventing bacterial complications and treating them early with antibiotics; health planners have to consider everything from what and how much is in the national stockpile to rethinking vaccination strategies with pneumococcal and *Haemophilus* influenza vaccines, and many similar issues.

SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?

I believe and certainly hope that many lives will be saved through better treatment of, management of, and public health responsiveness to influenza.

David M. Morens, M.D.

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KEYWORDS: ASIAN INFLUENZA; RESPIRATORY-TRACT; A VIRUS; X-RAY; EPIDEMIC; INFECTION; PATHOLOGY; COMPLICATIONS; PNEUMOCOCCUS; EXPRESSION.



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